



5-8-2018

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A Psychoanalytic Reading of Haruki Murakami's "The Little Green Monster," "All God's
Children Can Dance," and "TV People"

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Commonwealth Honors in English

Bridgewater State University

May 8, 2018

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Introduction

The psyche is a mystery which a detective must unravel in order to understand why humans behave the way they do. When a psychologist, the detective, makes a diagnosis, he or she is one step closer to understanding the motivations behind a specific behavior. When this type of detective work is applied to fiction, the detective is doing psychoanalytic criticism. This thesis employs psychoanalytic criticism to unlock the mystery's within three of author Haruki Murakami's short stories: "Little Green Monster," "All God's Children Can Dance," and "TV People." Using this type of criticism allows for a deeper understanding of the stories and opens a new line of inquiry into Murakami's works.

Haruki Murakami was born in Kyoto, Japan on January 12, 1949. Murakami's father was a college professor who pressured him to have perfect grades and expected him to take a job with a large car company; but this was not the course that Murakami envisioned for his life. Instead, in his self-proclaimed "state of rebellion," Murakami, after finishing college, married at age 20 and opened a Jazz club called "Peter Cat" (named after his cat). When asked in an interview how he had the confidence to defy his parents, Murakami states: "Confidence; as a teenager? Because I knew what I loved. I loved to read; I loved to listen to music; and I love cats. Those three things. So, even though I was an only kid, I could be happy because I knew what I loved. Those three things haven't changed from my childhood. I know what I love, still, now. That's confidence. If you don't know what you love, you are lost" (qtd. in Brockes). Murakami's passion for reading, ironically, accounts for his initial fear of writing novels.

Though he had written several short stories, Murakami was hesitant about his ability to write novels: He admits that "the reason I did not think of becoming a writer is very simple. I felt that I possessed neither the talent nor the qualifications to be a good novelist. So I never felt like

penning a novel. Rather than writing an inconsequential novel, I would much rather be on the side of reading good novels” (Murakami, “A Conversation with Murakami about *Sputnik Sweetheart*”). This feeling did not go away until one day Murakami when was watching an American baseball game, he suddenly had an epiphany: “perhaps I too can write a novel.” Since publishing his first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, in 1979, Murakami has published multiple award winning novels and short story collections. With his publications reaching audiences worldwide, Murakami was able to close down his Jazz bar and focus solely on writing.

According to Rebecca Suter, the job of a psychoanalyst and a writer is quite similar as they both interpret reality. Suter writes, “the writer/analyst Murakami Haruki is able to give meaning to the stories that people tell him because he is able to give them a narrative form” (120). The narrative that Murakami creates is essential to making sense of the daily actions and feelings that each of his characters has by organizing them in a way that is accessible to his readers. The narrative form also provides in full detail the background of each character so that their everyday lives and behaviors can be interpreted and understood by readers. Psychoanalytic criticism can help us make sense of these stories.

One of the most important aspects responsibilities of a psychoanalytic critic is to not focus only on what a character is consciously doing but to uncover the unconscious motivations behind each action and behavior. Psychoanalysis is defined by Peter Barry as “a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorders by investigating the conscious and unconscious elements in the mind” (Barry 94). In this thesis, the unconscious is investigated by focusing on the id, ego, and superego, the three parts that make up the mind, according to psychologist Sigmund Freud. These three parts of the mind mediate conflicts between impulses, morals, and reason in the decision making process (Lapsley and Stey 1). When there is an imbalance between the id, ego,

and superego, mental disorders like schizophrenia manifest themselves. Another major part of investigating the unconscious mind requires looking at what is repressed or moved into the unconscious to protect the mind from harmful memories and painful emotions. When repressed memories come back into consciousness through dreams, painful memories can be worked through so that they are no longer harmful to the mind. When primary human instincts such as those that surround the Oedipus complex are not fully repressed they can then cause tensions between the id, ego, and superego and impact decision making. No matter what the reason for the psychological tension, psychoanalytic critics work to understand the reason for the psychological tension and determine the impact the tension has on a character's life.

This thesis attempts to fill a much needed gap in the scholarship on Murakami. Much of the scholarship currently available on Murakami's works consists of book reviews and plot summaries. This thesis focuses on three of Murakami's works through the specialized lens of psychoanalysis. The specific stories chosen for this thesis —“Little Green Monster,” whose main character's mind is plagued with the memory of her rape; “All God's Children Can Dance,” whose main character struggles with an unrepressed Oedipus Complex; and “TV People,” whose main character is schizophrenic—all lend themselves to a psychoanalytic reading due to the nature of their character's internal struggle with their unconscious minds.

Chapter 1: "The Little Green Monster": A Repression of Rape

According to psychologist Sigmund Freud, one way humans cope with traumatic experiences is to repress them, or move them from conscious memory to unconscious memory. These memories are not erased but are no longer present in the conscious mind, making them difficult but not impossible to remember and bring forward into consciousness. In "Freudian repression, the common view, and pathological science," Simon Boag quotes Freud on the theory of repression: the "theory of repression is the corner-stone on which the whole structure of psychoanalysis rests" (qtd. in Boag 74). For Freud's predecessor and colleague Carl Jung, these repressed memories can appear in dreams in the form of archetypes. In Murakami's "The Little Green Monster," the female protagonist experiences the repressed memory of her rape, which is conveyed through a visit by a little green monster in a dream. The little green monster is the expression of the Jung's shadow archetype which surfaces due to the dream like state that Murakami's main character and narrator is in. When read through a psychoanalytic lens, focusing on repression and phallic symbols, "The Little Green Monster" can be read as a retelling of one woman's traumatic rape.

The best condition for repressed memories to surface is when a person is in a dream-like state. "The Little Green Monster" begins with the unnamed female narrator staring out a window at her favorite childhood tree after her husband has left her home alone. She tells us, "The time slips by when I'm looking at the garden. It was dark before I knew it: I must have been there quite a while" (Murakami 152). Here she either fell asleep or is in the trance-like or dream-like state that one achieves when daydreaming. This state creates the perfect condition for a repressed memory to resurface. For Freud, "Repression here is comparable to a withdrawal from the painful stimuli and acts to minimize the immediate distress following 'psychical traumas'" (qtd.

in Boag 75). In this case, it is clear that the narrator withdraws from her senses as time slips by without her being fully aware; again, the conditions are now set for the surfacing of repressed memories. Though the narrator is unaware of what is to come, her mind has prepared her to confront the “psychical trauma” that she formerly faced by putting her in this withdrawn and relaxed mental state.

While in this dream-like state, the narrator stares at a tree which she equates with an “old friend.” This tree reminds her of a friend who she has not spoken to in a long time. As the narrator is staring outside after it has gotten dark out, she notices that “The ground near the base of the tree began to bulge upward as if some thick, heavy liquid were rising to the surface” (Murakami 153). As this is taking place, the narrator hears the rumbling sound of the tree trying to break through the ground and thinks that the sound is coming from inside of her. The narrator says that she thinks that these rumbings are “a warning from the dark cocoon my body was spinning within” (153). Before she sees the tree, the narrator has no idea where the sound is coming from and only knows that the sound is moving closer to her. When viewed from a Freudian perspective, the tree is a phallic symbol. The “thick heavy liquid” rising to the surface symbolizes ejaculation. When this phallic image is paired with the metaphor of the tree as an old friend, the image is a metaphor for an old friend ejaculating, implying sexual intercourse between the two friends. The fear that surrounds the narrator as the tree begins to surface creates a tone of fear and apprehension which mirrors what a woman would feel if she were being raped. If the metaphor is then combined with the tone, it is clear that the memory that is being surfaced through the image of the tree is a memory of a rape that the narrator has repressed. Freud tells us that “‘Repression’ of the memory of a distressing sexual experience which occurs in maturer years is only possible for those in whom that experience can activate the memory-trace of a

trauma in childhood” (qtd. in Boag 75). The narrator is already in a trance-like state, and the use of the phrase “old friend” suggest that this friend is someone from the narrator’s childhood. The narrator says that the tree that she is staring at when this memory surfaces is a tree that she planted as a child. The narrator watched the tree grow as she grew up so as she watches it in the present she is sent back to her childhood state of mind. This state of mind creates the perfect condition for childhood memories to resurface.

Out from the base of the tree emerges a little green monster. This creature is only ever referred to as a monster, which connotes something scary and demonic. As noted earlier, psychologist Carl Jung is known for his theory of archetypes, which are representations of aspects of the personality that appear in dreams through specific groups of images. According to this theory, the monster is the shadow archetype. This archetype is the repressed side of a person’s mind and is often the represented in sexual thoughts and actions (Woods and Harmon 150). Jung writes, “The shadow is what doesn’t fit into this Persona [another of Jung’s archetypes]. These ‘refused and unacceptable’ characteristics don’t go away; they are stuffed or repressed and can, if unattended to, begin to act on a life of their own” (Jung). This explains why the monster appears out of nowhere, acts without the narrator wanting it to, and acts against the narrator's wishes. The monster is described as having “slender, pink little arms and legs jutting out from its green-scaled body and long claws at the end of its hands and feet” (Murakami 154). Its scales and claws once again support the argument that the main character’s experience with a penis was not a pleasant one. When the monster is seen as a human, the claws symbolize a weapon that causes harm, implying that the person harmed the narrator. When combined with its phallic imagery, the monster can be understood as a man who harmed the narrator with his penis, making him a rapist.

Often times in a rape, especially if the rapist was a close friend of the victim, the victim will be afraid to report the rape not out of fear for themselves, but out of fear for what will happen to the rapist. The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault reported that, “When an offender is a friend or acquaintance, only 18 to 40 percent of sexual assaults are reported” (“Reporting Sexual Assault: Why Survivors Often Don’t”). Reasons why the victim does not report a rape include: the victim “did not want to get offender in trouble with law,” the victim “Did not want others to know,” the victim believes that there is “not enough proof,” etc. Any one of these reason for not reporting what readers of “The Little Green Monster” are to understand as a rape could apply to the narrator’s situation. On several occasions, the narrator is sympathetic towards the monster and doubts that the monster would really hurt her. The narrator sees the monster as “almost darling” and thinks, “I could see, too, that the monster meant me no harm” (Murakami 154). This, combined with the monster’s small size, makes the narrator feel as if the monster could be trustworthy and second guess her desire to hurt the monster.

In a dream, the pent up anger that is repressed within a rape victim is allowed to be acted upon and released. Freud says, “Repression occurs when a wish is believed to lead to both satisfaction and frustration. Psychological conflict ensues: an impulse or urge is present which seeks to release pleasure from a particular source and, if it were allowed free play, would release it” (qtd. in Boag 760). The narrator is given the opportunity or the “free play” to act upon her repressed anger and attack the monster. The narrator realizes that the monster no longer has power over her and begins to attack the monster in every way that she can imagine. For example, the narrator “tied [the monster] down to a heavy chair with thick wires, and with a needle-nose pliers I began ripping out its scales at the roots, one by one” (Murakami 155). Not only does she attack the monster but she makes sure that its death is particularly brutal. She overcomes her fear

fully when she thinks through the whole situation and yells at the monster: “You crawled out of my garden. You unlocked my door without permission. You came inside my house. I never asked you here. I have the right to think anything I want to” (156). Here, the word choice further supports the image of rape. The line “You unlocked my door without permission” suggests he entered her body without her permission, and “You came inside my house” suggests he ejaculated inside her. While the narrator is torturing the monster by ripping out its scales and stabbing “a hot soldering iron into the budging figs of its eyes” (155), the monster tries to evoke sympathy from the narrator, saying, “Please, madam, oh please, I beg of you, don’t think such horrible thoughts! I have no evil thoughts for you. I would never harm you. All I feel for you is love, is love” (155). This is the kind of thing a rapist might say to persuade a victim that the rape was not actually rape but instead an act of love. The monster’s pleas do not work on the narrator and she is able to conquer her fear and make the monster pay for scaring her, just as a victim reporting her rape would make the rapist pay by having him arrested. The narrator is able to respond to the sad looks from the monster, saying, “That won’t do any good. You can look all you want, but you can’t say a thing. You can’t do a thing. Your existence is over, finished, done” (156). The tone of finality and satisfaction coming from the narrator mirrors the triumph of a victim finally receiving justice for her rape and seeing her rapist behind bars. The narrator/victim can never be hurt by the same person again and she knows that no one else can fall victim to this monster/rapist. She also knows that nothing can be done to reverse the decision to turn in her rapist to the police or in this case destroy her rapist. The victim is left with the liberating feeling that she is now safe from ever having to encounter her rapist again. Psychologically, the victim has dealt with the trauma and is freed from the mental distress that this trauma has caused. By

telling the monster “Your existence is over, finished, done” (155), the narrator is also telling herself that the pain that the monster symbolizes no longer exists in her own mind.

Not all victims of crimes, including victims of rape, get justice. Some victims are too paralyzed by fear to report a rape, while others end in a trial with a verdict that they disagree with. When this happens, victims are left with feelings of uncertainty and darkness as the last line of the story leaves within the narrator and reader. After the narrator speaks her final words to the monster, the final visible piece of the monster, its eyes “dissolved into emptiness, and the room filled with the darkness of night” (256). In a place of justice, the room would have been filled with light. Instead, the room is filled with darkness and emptiness leaving an ominous feeling, leading the reader to question if this is truly the end of the monster’s tale or if the monster will come back. The room returns to its original state of darkness making the reader question if the memory returns to its original repressed state in the unconscious mind. In this state, the memory could return as the tree is still in the backyard, and the narrator says that her behavior of watching the tree is still something that she often does. If she does this she may return to her dreamlike state, recreating the conditions for the memory to resurface. If her rapist is unprosecuted, the victim is often afraid her rapist will return. Because the rapist was a trusted old friend, the narrator may also be left with a feeling of emptiness from losing this friend. She may feel as if someone is missing from her life. She may also feel as if she has lost the person that she once was and could possibly go into a depression, feeling the same kind of emptiness that narrator in “The Little Green Monster” feels.

Though Sigmund Freud’s theory of repression and Carl Jung’s archetypes are not widely accepted in psychology today, they are useful when reading Haruki Murakami’s “The Little Green Monster” as the retelling of a repression of a rape. Often times in dreams, real people are

represented symbolically through other characters, explaining why the rapist was portrayed as a monster instead of a human or the rapist himself. This also creates a safe environment where the victim does not have to directly confront her attacker. The words Murakami chooses suggest phallic imagery and allow the changing emotional tone of the narrator to be a focal point in the overall understanding of the narrator's attitudes toward the monster. This work stayed true to Murakami's interests. As Strecher argues:

Foremost of these [interests] is surely his on-going fascination with the human psyche, how the conscious and unconscious minds connect with one another, apprehend (or create!) realities, store memories, and formulate individual identity. His work is particularly concerned with how the human mind copes with some of its most basic, even primordial dreads: hunger, cold, darkness, solitude, illness, death. (Strecher)

"The Little Green Monster" deals with the conscious and unconscious mind, and repression as a coping mechanism. The uncertainty of the ending, wherein the narrator is left alone in the dark room, allows the reader to wonder if this dream will ever return or if the narrator is now free from this memory, as the unconscious was able to deal with the pain linked to this repressed memory. Hopefully, the narrator is now free of this pain and able to move forward and away from the little green monster.

Chapter 2: “All God’s Children Can Dance”: An Unrepressed Oedipus Complex

Murakami’s fascination with the human psyche manifests itself in “The Little Green Monster” but does not stop with an analysis of repression. Murakami also explores Sigmund Freud’s seduction theory, which Freud would later revise to present a more detailed theory of the Oedipus complex. Murakami employs Freud’s theories of seduction and the Oedipal Complex, and continues to use Freud’s theory of repression to illuminate the character Yoshia in his story “All God’s Children Can Dance.” This story is told through third person narration and brings the reader on Yoshia’s journey of self-exploration as he tries to make sense of his sexual relationship with his mother, while also coming to terms with the void that has been left in his life because his father would not recognize Yoshia’s existence. Through Yoshia’s story in “All God’s Children Can Dance” Haruki Murakami explores the potentially detrimental effects that can be had if a child’s Oedipus Complex goes unrepressed due to the malformation of the child’s Superego.

When a child is young, s/he does not have a complex understanding of sex and sexuality. Most often children are innocent and do not understand where babies come from. Sigmund Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex challenges this widely accepted notion of childhood innocence. Freud says that,

A child’s sexual wishes — if in their embryonic stage they deserve to be so described — awaken very early ... a girl’s first affection is for her father and a boy’s first childish desires are for his mother. Accordingly, the father becomes a disturbing rival to the boy and the mother to the girl. ... The parents too give evidence as a rule of sexual partiality: a natural predilection usually sees to it that a man tends to spoil his little daughters,

while his wife takes her sons' part; though both of them, where their judgment is not disturbed by the magic of sex, keep a strict eye upon their children's education. (Morgenstern 779-80)

This theory presents itself through Yoshia who not only lives with his mother as an adult, but also has sexual feelings towards her. Yoshia explains that his mother, "Whenever she felt lonely at night would crawl under his covers with him almost nothing on" (Murakami 30). This occurs not only in Yoshia's current young adult life but also all throughout his upbringing. In this moment, it appears as if there is a role reversal and Yoshia's mother is the child, as it is normally the child who goes to his/her parents in the middle of the night. With his mother in bed with him, Yoshia is unable to repress his Oedipus complex. Yoshia does not have a father, so instead of wanting to kill his father, he has no one to contend with to keep his mother's attention and love. Instead Yoshia is invited to have intimate moments with his mother, even if mostly during sleep, which should be a time and state of comfort.

Though Yoshia may understand that the relationship dynamic between him and his mother is inappropriate and unconventional, he still unconsciously has physical reactions to his mother. As Yoshia sleeps with his mother's arm wrapped around him, he should feel comfortable, as a mother's touch normally has this effect on her child. Instead Yoshia feels the opposite. Yoshia "knew she meant nothing by it, but still it made him nervous" (Murakami 50). This nervousness is not a feeling of uncertainty or fear but instead it is a nervousness due to sexual tension. Because Yoshia never was able to repress his Oedipus complex Yoshia still unconsciously feels sexually attracted to his mother. "[Yoshia]," the narrator tells us, "would have to twist himself into incredible positions to keep his mother unaware of his erection" (50). Even though Yoshia understands that his mother is not trying to be sexual, his body still

unconsciously reacts as if Yoshia's mother could be someone that he could have a sexual relationship with because of the biological need to reproduce. Yoshia is uncomfortable with his reactions and goes to great lengths to stop them from happening, but he cannot control his unconscious mind.

What Yoshia is experiencing is an imbalance between his id, ego, and superego. Freud says that the mind is divided into the conscious and the unconscious mind. The conscious part of the mind is easily accessible and contains actions and thoughts that can be controlled. For example, the conscious mind is used when someone decides to answer his/her phone or go hug a friend. The unconscious part of the mind controls involuntary functions such as breathing and memory. Within the conscious and the unconscious mind exist the id, ego, and superego. Psychologists Daniel K. Lapsley and Paul C. Stey say that "The id represents the biological foundations of personality. It is the reservoir of basic instinctual drives, particularly sexual (libidinal) drives, which motivate pleasure seeking" (Lapsley and Stey 1). The id exists completely in the unconscious mind and is the impulsive part of the brain. Lapsley and Stey describe the next part of the mind, the ego writing, "The ego emerges as a result of the direct influence of the external world. It regulates libidinal drive energies so that satisfaction accords with the demands of reality" (Lapsley and Stey 1). The ego lies partially in the conscious mind and partially in the unconscious mind. The final part of the mind, the Superego, also lies in both the conscious and the unconscious mind. For Lapsley and Stey, "The superego bids the psychic apparatus to pursue idealistic goals and perfection. It is the source of moral censorship and conscience" (Lapsley and Stey 1). The three elements, when functioning correctly, work together to make rational and socially acceptable decisions that satisfy one's impulses.

While Sigmund Freud worked with his many patients, he struggled to understand the psychological traumas that they were dealing with from their childhood. Before his theory of the Oedipus complex was published, Freud came up with the seduction theory, which mostly deals with sexual abuse. Freud said that,

“Actual seduction, too, is common enough; it is initiated either by other children or by someone in charge of the child who wants to soothe it, or send it to sleep or make it dependent on them. Where seduction intervenes it invariably disturbs the natural course of the developmental processes, and it often leaves extensive and lasting consequences.” (qtd. in Tabin 294)

If Yoshia were not her son, Yoshia’s mother’s habit of walking around the house naked and sleeping in Yoshia’s bed would be considered acts of seduction. Because Yoshia is his mother’s son, the lines are blurred as to whether or not they are acts of seduction. To a child whose Oedipus Complex is still not repressed, these are easily seen as acts of seduction; because his superego is not yet fully developed, the child is still too young to understand the consequences of his mother’s unusual behavior. Though Yoshia was never directly sexually abused by his mother, his mother’s actions did psychologically impact his development.

In Yoshia’s case, the superego was not informed by a role model that modeled socially acceptable behaviors as it developed, creating tension between the id, ego, and superego in Yoshia’s later stages of life. The superego is developed during the phallic stage of development, according to Freud’s psychosexual stages of development which takes place during ages three to five (McLeod). Yoshia’s Oedipus Complex could have been mitigated by the superego if Yoshia’s mother had not created an environment where Yoshia was encouraged to have sexual

inclinations towards her. In a discussion of the Oedipus complex, Martin S. Bergmann writes, “The Oedipus complex had the status of an infantile fantasy that underwent repression. Although he did not state it explicitly, Freud implies that the Oedipus complex was once, in infancy, a conscious fantasy that was repressed during the latency years, but remained sufficiently intact in the unconscious that we can speak of it as an unconscious fantasy” (536). As Yoshia went through his infantile state, he never fully repressed his Oedipus complex. Then when he went into the toddler stage and simultaneously the phallic stage, Yoshia still thought that it was appropriate to see his mother as a potential sexual partner, so, as his superego formed, this was the psychological parameter that was established. The formation of his superego takes place as the Oedipus complex moves into Yoshia’s conscious mind to his unconscious mind as he ages so he is unaware that this is the moral structure that is establishing itself in his brain. As Yoshia continues to age, he encounters society’s influences on the ego, which tells the ego that it is inappropriate for him to have sexual relations with his mother. This understanding causes the tension that Yoshia feels now because his id is saying that he has sexual impulses and his mother is a female; therefore, she is a potential partner. His superego is saying that it is okay to have sexual relations with his mother because it was never established that this is not okay, causing the physical erections that Yoshia experiences when his mother gets in bed with him; meanwhile his ego reminds him that society says that he cannot reproduce with his mother. The tension between the three elements of the mind causes much of Yoshia’s discomfort when it comes to dealing with his mother; and it prevents him from being able to have a socially acceptable relationship with a woman.

Even after Yoshia spends time away from his mother and has had a relationship with a woman other than his mother, Yoshia still cannot commit himself to another relationship. After

college, Yoshia's girlfriend asks him to marry her. Yoshia declines because he can only think about his mother: "What would happen, he wondered, if he could remain his present self and yet turn time backward so as to meet his mother in her youth when her world was in its deepest state of darkness? No doubt they would plunge as one into the muck of bedlam and devour each other in acts for which they would be dealt the harshest punishment" (Murakami 67). Not only does Yoshia admit that he has sexual inclinations towards his mother and would have sex with her if they were the same age, but he also admits that because of the religious and societal values in which he has been raised he would be punished for having sexual intercourse with his mother. In this moment, the id and the part of the superego that has been tainted by the Oedipus complex outweighs the part of the superego that takes into account Yoshia's religious values and disregards the ego completely. These feelings and the complete imbalance of the ego and superego prevent Yoshia from ever having a relationship with a woman other than his mother. Though Yoshia never does have sexual intercourse with his mother, the titillating effects of unconsciously wanting sexual interactions with his mother are detrimental to Yoshia's development. If Yoshia had repressed his Oedipus Complex as a child, he could have potentially married his college girlfriend and would have been able to focus on coming to terms with the loss of his father. Though Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex is not accepted today, it is useful in understanding relationships like Yoshia's and his mother's. Researchers will never be able to prove Freud's theory correct, but psychoanalytic critics will continue to employ it to examine relationships such as Yoshia's and his mother's to great effect.

Chapter 3: “TV People”: A Commentary on Mental Illness

When someone has a lot on his or her mind, the world may seem to be passing him/her by. He or she often feels alone and misunderstood. This sense of loneliness is only magnified if this person is dealing with a mental illness, an illness that is hidden from the world. Despite being invisible, mental illness can take over one’s life. In Murakami’s “TV People” the narrator is suffering from schizophrenia but he and the people around him, including his wife, are unaware of it. As the narrator begins to show outward signs of mental instability, his relationship with his wife begins to fray, and eventually she leaves without saying a word to her husband. Through the narrator in “TV People,” Murakami reveals the hardships that people with mental illness face due to society’s ignorance about this invisible disease..

“TV People” begins in the unnamed male narrator’s home. The narrator lives an ordinary life with his wife. Sundays, he tells us, are his least favorite day because “without fail, Sunday evening my head starts to ache. In varying intensity each time” (Murakami 196). Though this seems like just a potential neurological disorder, the headaches are also accompanied by sounds that are not quite sounds: “I hear things. Not sounds, but thick slabs of silence being dragged through the dark. KRZSHAAALKKRZSHAAAAAL KKKKRMMMS” (196). These noises are heard only by the narrator, and yet the noises are, ironically, the sounds of silence, the very absence of sound, so it is impossible to hear them. These noises are only part of a systematic confusion from which the narrator suffers every Sunday: “First, the aching. Then, a slight distortion of my vision. Tides of confusion wash through, premonitions tugging at memories, memories tugging at premonitions” (197). Confusion is also accompanied by paranoia. “People,” the narrator thinks, “walk extra loud down the hall just to get me” (197). This type of paranoia is a common symptom of schizophrenia. (Picchioni and Murray 92) The confusion and paranoia

that the narrator is experiencing seems not to be based in everyday life but instead in a deeply rooted problem within the narrator's unconscious. The mind cannot decide which memories to repress and move completely into the unconscious and which memories to try and work through at that current moment. The premonition, which can simply be defined as paranoia, that something unpleasant is going to happen does not come as a result of anything concrete but is only a feeling that the narrator experiences in his head. The feeling that the people in the hall are out to get him is a continuation of these premonitions but has no basis in logic or reason.

Though the paranoia does not seem to be taking over the narrator's life, eventually the narrator begins to hallucinate. The small humans that he sees—and refers to as TV People—consume his thoughts. Because the narrator is in his Sunday state of mind, there is “all the more reason for the TV People to single out Sunday evening as the time to come around” (Murakami 197). The Sunday state of mind is a dream-like state in which the narrator is unfocused on the current place that he is in and is wrapped up in his thoughts. Freud and Jung would say that this is the perfect state of mind for hallucinations to occur:

The central model for... the generation of schizophrenia's hallucinations and delusional system is described as the intrusion of nighttime dream states into the waking consciousness. In this theoretical exegesis, a rent or tear is made in the ego instigated by strongly repressed aggressive impulses which then create a dream-world for the patient as they subsequently overwhelm ego defenses. (qtd. in Dixon 4)

The ego, which works with logic and reasoning, is clearly already compromised in the narrator's mind as he thinks that real people are walking loudly in the hallway to upset him when they are most likely unaware that they are walking loudly at all. The narrator has already stated that there

are memories and premonitions that are creating confusion. These memories when using psychoanalysis are understood to be repressed impulses trying to come out. These conditions, just as the narrator unconsciously recognizes, are perfect for the TV People, the narrator's hallucinations, to come out and infiltrate the narrator's consciousness.

When the TV People set up a TV in the narrator's living room, they bring out the narrator's obsessive compulsive tendencies and cause him to question his existence. When the TV People first appear to the narrator he tells us that "They don't knock or ring the doorbell. Don't say anything. They just sneak right in. I do not hear a footstep" (Murakami 198). The lack of footsteps and the fact that they do not knock confirms the fact that these people are hallucinations. When the TV People are present, what the narrator hears, ironically, is the sound of silence that he hears on any Sunday, which Murakami signifies by a string of capital letters. The TV people not only confuse the narrator by making him wonder why they are there, but they also make him question his previous actions and his own existence rather than the existence of the TV People. The narrator tries to figure out if it is possible for the TV People to come in through the door: "The door was locked, I think, but I can't be certain. Maybe I forgot to lock it. It really wasn't foremost in my thoughts at the time, so who knows? Still, I think the door was locked" (198). Though the narrator does not question the legitimacy of the TV People, he does begin to question his own actions. The repetition of his thoughts and his obsession with whether or not he locked the door shows obsessive compulsive tendencies. The narrator also begins to question his own existence when the TV People do not acknowledge him: "The TV People ignore me from the very outset. All three of them have this look that says the likes of me don't exist" (199). In this moment, the narrator is separating himself from the TV People as if they are separate species but he never thinks to question the existence of the TV People. From the

moment that they come in, the narrator accepts them as real though they do not acknowledge his existence. Because they do not acknowledge him, the narrator begins to think that he is the one who does not really exist, but he does not try to interact with the TV People to figure out who is real.

As the TV People finish setting up the TV and leave, the narrator tries to rationalize his lack of interaction with the TV People, which only makes him seem more mentally unstable. Though the narrator fully acknowledges that a “normal person” would have tried to get the TV People out of his house, he says that he could only sit there dumbfounded. His rationale for not talking to the TV People gives readers insight into his mental state: “Not to excuse myself, but *you* have people right in front of you denying your very presence like that, then see if you don’t doubt whether you actually exist” (202). The narrator believes that all people have people in their lives who deny their existence and that this is a normal occurrence. This rationalization of his hallucinations aligns with one of the symptoms of schizophrenia:

People with schizophrenia typically hear voices (auditory hallucinations), which often criticize or abuse them. The voices may speak directly to the patient, comment on the patient's actions, or discuss the patient among themselves. Not surprisingly, people who hear voices often try to make some sense of these hallucinations, and this can lead to the development of strange beliefs or delusions. (Picchioni & Murry 91)

Though the TV People are not criticizing the narrator, they are abusing him by not talking to him and making him question his existence. The narrator tries to make sense of the TV People by normalizing them and thinking that everyone has their own TV People. As the narrator tries to rationalize his lack of interaction with the TV People, his state of mind continues to deteriorate

as he questions more of his existence: “I look at my hands half expecting to see clear through them. I’m devastated, powerless, in a trance. My body, my mind are vanishing fast. I can’t bring myself to move. It’s all I can do to watch the three TV People deposit their television in my apartment and leave. I can’t open my mouth for fear of what my voice might sound like” (202).

Not only does the narrator illustrate his own personal struggle with mental illness but he also conveys a larger point about people facing various types of mental illness. The narrator says that he feels powerless, like he is in a trance, because he has no control over what he is seeing and what is happening to him. He can only watch his delusions infiltrate his safe space, his home, and leave a piece of themselves, the TV, there. The TV then becomes a constant reminder of the TV people and, therefore, of the mental illness that is inhibiting him from functioning as a normal human being. This is a common struggle for many who have a mental illness and who feel as if it is taking over their lives and that there is nothing they can do about it. The constant reminder of the TV People makes the narrator hyper-focused, causing him to withdraw socially from the world.

As the narrator continues to deal with his hallucinations, he becomes so consumed with them that he cannot understand why other people cannot see them and starts distancing himself from those around him. One day the TV People appear at the narrator’s place of work. This is the first time that they have left the narrator’s house. The narrator is in a meeting when the TV people come in with a TV. They try to find a place in the room to install it but cannot find a sufficient space, so they leave with the TV. The narrator reflects on the occurrence:

The others in the room show no reaction to the TV People. And they can’t have missed them. No, they’ve definitely seen them. And the proof is they even got out of the way, clearing a path for the TV People to carry their

television through, still, that's as far as it went: a reaction no more alarmed than when the nearby coffee shop delivered. They'd made it a ground rule not to acknowledge the presence of the TV people. The others all knew they were there, they just acted as if they weren't. (209).

Once again, the paranoid narrator believes that a group of people are against him. The narrator, through his description of his workplace makes it seem like he is comfortable at work and has no major qualms with his coworkers. In this instance, without his functioning ego to tell him that he is being irrational, the narrator makes it seem as if everyone at his office is out to get him, as they do not acknowledge the existence of the TV People, making him more confused. As if it were not enough that none of the people reacted to the TV People during the meeting, the narrator decides to mention the TV People to one of his co-workers while they are alone together in the bathroom. He says to his co-worker, "Oh, by the way, those guys who came in with the TV just now..." (209); he quickly decides not to finish the sentence. The narrator knows that the subject is not meant to be spoken about: "Maybe he didn't hear me. Or maybe he's pretending not to hear. I can't tell. But from the sudden strain in the atmosphere, I know enough not to ask" (209). Despite his coworker's awkward response, the narrator still does not understand that he is the only one seeing the TV People. His decision not to mention the TV People aligns with one of the symptoms of schizophrenia, social withdrawal. Picchioni and Murray say that the negative symptoms of schizophrenia include "social withdrawal, self neglect, loss of motivation and initiative, emotional blunting, and paucity of speech social withdrawal, self neglect, loss of motivation and initiative, emotional blunting, and paucity of speech" (Picchioni& Murray 92). Just as he withdraws from his coworkers, the narrator does the same with his wife.

Communication is one of the most important aspects of a relationship, and it is clear there is something wrong when communication breaks down. Though the narrator is extremely observant of the small details of his relationship, he completely misses the social cues that his wife is giving him due to his obsession with his hallucination. As the TV People are placing the TV in his living room, the narrator is most concerned with how his wife will react when she gets home from work. When the TV people move a clock onto the floor to be able to place the TV on the mantel, the narrator thinks, “The wife is going to raise hell. She hates it when things get randomly shifted about. If everything isn’t in its proper place, she gets really sore” (Murakami 200). The narrator also gets upset when the TV People throw a pile of magazines on the floor because he knows his wife will be very upset that the magazines are all over the floor and no longer have their bookmarks in them. Instead of getting the response that he thinks that he will get, the narrator’s wife “doesn’t say a thing, [she] just gives the place a once-over” (203). The narrator’s wife continues to stay distant from him throughout the rest of the night as he focuses on the imaginary TV: “the wife has seated herself on the carpet and is flipping through the *Elle*, oblivious of the fact that the TV has just been turned on and off” (204). Though these seem like small instances of the narrator’s wife being withdrawn to the narrator, they are the beginnings of a much larger wedge being driven between him and his wife. The wife not commenting on the objects being moved in the house, despite her usually being upset, is a sign of her giving up on caring about the smaller things in their relationship. The narrator does not see this and does not think to ask because he is too focused on the hallucination of the TV and the fact that his wife is not commenting specifically on the TV.

The lack of communication between the narrator and his wife, and the narrator’s focus on his hallucinations, ultimately lead his wife to leave him. On the final night in the story, the

narrator gets upset when his wife is late coming home. He explains that, “whenever either of us knows he or she is going to be later than six, we always call in. That’s the rule” (211). The narrator goes on to explain that the rules, such as calling when they are going to be late, are in place so that they both know where the other is and what plans to make for dinner. The narrator obsesses over this just as he does with the way his wife will react to the mess that the TV People made earlier in the week. Eventually, however, the TV People take over his thoughts once again and the narrator completely forgets about his wife not coming home. It is only when the TV People bring up the narrator’s wife, saying, “Shame about your wife” (214), does the narrator finally begin to think about his wife and the distance between the two. The narrator questions the TV People, saying, “How’s that?,” to which the TV people respond, “How’s that? It’s gone too far” (214). In this moment, though he struggles to draw a conclusion, the narrator realizes that not only has his wife not called but that she might never come back. The narrator thinks, “Maybe the wife is out there. She’s gone somewhere far away. By whatever means of transport, she’s gone somewhere far out of my reach. Maybe our relationship has suffered irreversible damage. Maybe it’s a total loss. Only I haven’t noticed. All sorts of thoughts unravel inside me, then the frayed ends come together again” (215). The narrator finally realizes that he has been missing part of the world around him. He realizes that all of the little instances where his wife was no longer caring was her withdrawing from him, but he still cannot pinpoint a reason why. Though he was thinking about the TV People before having these thoughts about his wife, he never states that it was because of them, because he still does not understand that these are hallucinations. For a moment, connections are made in the narrator’s mind. These connections have been impossible for the past few days due to the narrator’s preoccupations with the TV People. The narrator understands that the TV people are distracting him from the real world. However, this clarity is

short lived because the narrator's mental illness soon takes over and he is not able to fully process the loss of his wife or why this has happened.

Murakami's story "TV People" is a commentary on mental illness as a whole and the struggles and stigmas that come with it. Just as the narrator feels like he cannot talk to his coworkers about the TV People because they cannot see the TV People, many people feel as if they cannot talk about their mental illness with anyone in their lives. They often live in silence and then have to try and understand their illness and cope with it on their own. Just as the narrator's wife and coworkers ignore any signs that narrator is suffering from mental illness, many people ignore others' mental illnesses, deny that they are real, or question the toll that these illnesses can have on people. Without giving attention to mental illness, sufferers can potentially lose all of the people they care about. They can also be left as a shell of their former selves if they are unaware of the toll that their illness is taking on them. In "TV People," Murakami challenges his readers to begin to erase the stigma surrounding mental illness and illuminate the toll mental illness can have on an individual's life.

Conclusion

Throughout this analysis, I have demonstrated the usefulness of applying psychoanalytic criticism to Haruki Murakami's work. Murakami's work takes on an air of fantasy while still accurately portraying the psychological conditions that are present in everyday society. In "The Little Green Monster," Murakami represents the struggle that many victims of sexual assault face as they try to cope with and make sense of the traumatic experience that they have gone through. Murakami reveals this through a story of a woman who is alone in her home one night and is visited by a little green monster. The monster is representative of the narrator's childhood rapist and its surfacing is the resurfacing of the repressed memory of the narrator's rape. Through her dream, the narrator is able to come to terms with her rape by getting justice for her rape through her attack on the monster. This frees the narrator of any unresolved frustration and fear towards the monster and helps her to realize that her rapist will never be able to harm her again.

In "All God's Children Can Dance," Murakami highlights the issues that children, especially males, face when they do not have a father figure in their lives. For Murakami's character, Yoshia, the absence of his father, as well as the sexual actions of his mother, cause his mind to fail to repress his Oedipus Complex. Because he is unable to repress his desire for his mother, tension is created between Yoshia's id, ego, and superego, which prevents him from being able to make decisions about his sexual impulses. Yoshia can never have a true relationship with another woman and will always have sexual inclinations towards his mother.

Finally, in "TV People," Murakami expresses the social alienation that mental illnesses such as schizophrenia can cause for those who suffer from them. In "TV People," Murakami's narrator suffers from schizophrenia. His hallucinations distract him from seeing that his wife is distancing herself from him, as are his co-workers. In the end, the narrator is left completely

alone because neither him nor the people around him understood his mental illness or did anything about it.

Though these specific stories lend themselves to being read through a psychoanalytic lens, further research on Murakami's works can be done through other lenses. This thesis focuses on three short stories but further research could also be done on Murakami's novels. No matter what lenses are used to analyze his work, Murakami's works, because of their complexity and, frankly, their strangeness, will continue to bear interesting fruit.

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